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メタデータ	言語: eng
	出版者:
	公開日: 2021-05-06
	キーワード (Ja):
	キーワード (En):
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URL	所属:
	<a href="https://doi.org/10.15021/00009762">https://doi.org/10.15021/00009762</a>

## **Self-Ironic Playing with Minority Identity: Humorous Web Music Videos as an Empowering Tool among Swedish-Speaking Finns**

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A common talking point when researchers of music and minorities meet appears to be the complex question of outlining their field of study's core and limits: what is a minority and how does some specific music relate to the category of minority? Having done research on the Swedish-speaking population of Finland, a minority to which I formally belong but have not always primarily associated myself with in all fields of life, I personally feel that the key issues surrounding the problems of defining a minority and who is a member of a minority are often related to authority. To study minorities seems to be an intricate form of identity research, as it not only includes asking on what premises and from whose perspective an identity is defined, but also how the process of definition is related to fundamental questions of power. The concept of the minority incorporates the positioning of a smaller and/or weaker population group in relation to a larger and/or stronger group of people. Perhaps as a result of the complexity of defining a minority and the connections between it and some music, I often hover between an axiomatic use of the term 'minority' and a questioning of the whole concept. This also often leads to a strict reduction of identities into either/or categories when, in fact, it might often be justified to focus on precisely the many contradictory dimensions of the phenomenon under study.

In this study, I want to argue that minority identities often include a certain playfulness, self-irony, and self-conscious inclusion and distancing through humour, which can be empowering for individuals and the minority as a whole. As Bhabha (1998) recognises in relation to Jewish humour, self-ironic humour can be an important part of a minority's existence and even a form of self-preservation. Inspired by Freud's analysis of joke-work, Bhabha (1998: xvii) states, 'The joke circulates around a doubly articulated subject: the negatively marked subject, singled out, at first, as a figure of fun or abuse, is turned through the joke-act into an inclusive, yet agonistic, form of self-critical identification for which the community takes responsibility'. Joking can create a structure of self-critical identification that provides a way for minority communities to confront the criticisms that come from outside and the criticisms that emerge inwardly, that is, from within the community itself.

I believe these various sides of humour can also be crucial elements when music constructs and questions a sense of belonging. Thus, I will explore how humorous music

videos published on the Internet can be used to reinforce, question, and renew minority identity. In my discussion, I will draw on various threads of research on the philosophy and social functions of humour. I not only claim that the videos can contribute to identity construction; I believe that through their polysemic character, they also offer an empowering tool and framework for agency when individuals negotiate their identities in relation to an established minority ethnicity. This has led me to ask how humour is created in the studied videos and what social functions this humour and the videos in general have from a minority perspective. What makes the videos so topical is their importance as a form of cultural expression today, when digital development has made it possible to create and disseminate homemade videos with the help of basic computer equipment and skills. For many of the studied artists, they are a primary product, and for their younger audiences, they are the main media of musical consumption. In other words, they are key elements of today's musicking, to use Small's (1998) concept, and they offer interesting material for an expansion of the analysis of 'music per se' into an ethnomusicological study of music and/in/as culture in contemporary society.

The analysis focuses on videos created by members of the Swedish-speaking minority of Finland, the so-called Finland-Swedes. This population group forms roughly 5.5% of Finland's total population, and its musical-cultural identity is mainly constructed in relation to three major others, namely the Finnish majority culture, the culture of Sweden, and international (often Anglo-American) culture (see Brusila 2008; 2009). These three cultural spheres are perceived to be different from, and sometimes even a threat to, the so-called Finland-Swedish culture. Despite this fairly strong general Finland-Swedish self-identification—which is institutionalised in Swedish media, for example, as well as in educational and cultural institutions in Finland—this minority is culturally heterogeneous and scattered along Finland's coastline. As a result of this coupled with the fact that the total number of Swedish-speakers in Finland is only roughly 290,000, the minority has never been able to viably sustain its own music industry or even a niche market within the national industry. It is unsurprising then that many younger musicians have enthusiastically utilised the possibilities offered by new digital media technology and the Internet. Since the turn of the millennium, Finland-Swedish artists from the region of Ostrobothnia in particular have expressed not only their minority identity, but also their various local and linguistic particularities through web video productions.

## **1. Humour, Music, and Minority Culture**

Theories of humour have historically focused on explaining why something is understood to be humorous and what consequences humour can have. Since the 1980s, it has become customary to categorise these approaches into three major models: superiority, incongruity, and relief theories. Superiority theory is often described as the oldest and most enduring of these. Both Plato and Aristotle have been classified as adherents of this model for having regarded humour as a form of derision, which could ideally serve as a social corrective. According to the superiority model, laughers position themselves above

whatever they laugh at and take pleasure in judging the object of their laughter as inferior to themselves. In the eighteenth century, these theories were superseded by the incongruity model, which is based on the assertion that comedic pleasure is born out of unexpected connections between ideas. The incongruity model draws on writings by Kant and Schopenhauer and focuses more on cognitive aspects than on inequality between superior and inferior persons. From this perspective, humour occurs when our anticipations are disrupted in surprising ways. This can happen as a result of absurd wordplays and linguistic wit, for example. It can also occur when a comedian unexpectedly combines inappropriate elements, so that our general attitudes about what is fitting are revealed and brought into question. In the so-called relief theories, humour is regarded as affording us relief from the restraint of conventional social requirements. Freud was the most renowned developer of this approach; for him, humour is a means of outwitting the inhibitions that prevent us from developing and expressing our natural impulses. Although psychoanalytical studies often focus on the taboos of sex and hostility, relief models have also been adapted to describe more general feelings of relief from social expectations. (for categorisation of humour theories, see e.g., *Monro 1988; Olsson et al. 2003: 46–47; Billig 2005: 38*).

Although these general models are widely referenced, *Monro's* portrayal of their character is worth remembering: 'Each of these theories of humor is able to explain some types of humor, but it may be doubted if any of them can satisfactorily explain every type of humor' (*Monro 1988: 355*). Their strength lies in illuminating some aspect of humour and often more than one can be relevant as concurrent explanations of why a particular phenomenon is considered to be humorous.

The theories have also been applied in research on music, with a focus on musical structure, performing practices, lyrics, and intertextuality, for example. Often, stylistic norms frame musical humour, although it is possible to find a large variety of multiple techniques combined at once, even within a single style. In his study of British rock humour, *Ellis (2012: 5 et passim)* finds a broad, eclectic variety of features—ranging from satire, parody, sarcasm, wordplay, and absurdism to irony—which, in different ways, reflect elements of the superiority, incongruity, and relief models. In general, superiority humour can be seen in many social critics' satirical lyrics or in laughter directed towards an incompetent performer. However, the use of stylistic incongruity is among the most common ways of creating humour. This can be done by incorporating antithetical stylistic features, unexpected structural turns, and exaggerations that break stylistic norms in an otherwise stylistically consistent composition (see e.g., *Covach 1990; 1995*). Relief humour can appear when controversial artists, through their music, lyrics, and public performances, collectively facilitate a society's taboos, such as sex and aggression.

While humour can be explained as a product of superiority, incongruity, or relief, it is pertinent from a sociological perspective to ask not only why something is humorous, but also what role humour plays in culture and human interaction. *Kuipers (2008: 366 et passim)* lists the most important sociological perspectives on humour as functionalist, conflict, symbolic interactionist, phenomenological, and comparative-historical

approaches. Especially in older studies, sociologists have interpreted humour in terms of the social functions it fulfils in terms of maintaining and supporting the social order. In its most structuralist form, the functionalist approach can easily appear to carry conservative implications if it narrows the function of humour to safeguarding existing social structures (for criticism, see e.g., Billig 2005: 122–123). Thus, it is important to point out that humour can express conflict, struggle, or antagonism in such a way that it becomes a form of attack with negative consequences. For example, Fine (1983: 173) identifies humour's most significant functions as not only promoting group cohesion and providing social control, but also provoking intergroup conflict (for a cultural critical study relating to music videos and ethnicity, see Kärjä 2018). It can also be argued that even ethnic jokes that are told by the same group the joke targets can be problematic because they reinforce stereotypes and ethnic categorisations in general (e.g., Howitt and Owusu-Bempah 2005: 64). Symbolic interactionist studies emphasise humour's importance in the construction of meanings and social relations in interaction. From this perspective, humour, due to its ambiguous nature, is well-suited to negotiations and manipulations of the self and relationships in society. This social constructionist approach is developed further in phenomenological theories, which conceptualise humour as a specific 'outlook' or 'worldview' for perceiving and constructing the social world. In comparative-historical studies, these various ways of perceiving and constructing social structures have been analysed through comparisons across time and space (Kuipers 2008: 377–386).

Following the abovementioned sociological theories, we can summarise that humour, regardless of whether it is based on superiority, incongruity, or relief, can function as a means of constructing and negotiating identities, social categories, and ways of understanding the world. Thus, ethnicity, for example, is often the subject of much joking, and joking forms a central part of creating a sense of ethnic belonging, making otherwise unexpressed social tendencies observable. In this sense, music videos and ethnicity can be discussed both in terms of how humorous effects are created and with what social purposes and consequences. As a means of social interaction, humour, not to mention today's audio-visual formats on the Internet, is imbued with polysemy, offering many and even contradictory ways of expressing one's social belonging or distancing. In order to study them, we must not only see music, humour, and web videos as independent objects, we must also see them as practices that exist and find their meaning in a social context, in other words, as aspects of human musicking.

## **2. 1G3B: The Internet as a Platform for Creativity**

Until the 1990s, the production and distribution of music through electronic media was managed in a country such as Finland, for the most part, by the commercial record industry or, as in the case of a small minority such as the Finland-Swedes, by the national broadcasting companies. The introduction of digital music production tools and particularly Internet-based distribution technology gradually transformed the field, and by the turn of the millennium, it was already possible to make high-quality music and even

simple audio-visual productions using affordable home equipment.

One of the first Finland-Swedish musical groups to establish their position in the new digital music media at the turn of the millennium was the metal band 1G3B (for a detailed analysis, see Brusila 2010). The band started offering its music on its website in the form of free downloadable mp3 files; eventually, 1G3B also began offering videos, information about the band's activities, a discussion forum, song lyrics and tablatures, absurd stories and proverbial sayings written by the musicians, fan polls, merchandise, and downloadable digital wallpaper images and ring tones (*1G3B Äfisiell Bändsiid*). This proved to be an efficient way of connecting with the audience, particularly because the bandmembers studied and had daytime jobs, without any plans to tour or become fulltime professional musicians.

Digital technology also offered the members new ways of expressing their creativity. The launch of Macromedia Flash software made it possible to produce video clips for their songs. The first clips, *Bråtas (Wrestling)*, for example, were simple animations and contained mostly just the lyrics. This was a way of making the songs more accessible to a larger audience, since they are sung in a very strong local Swedish dialect, which is spoken mainly by the around 10,000 people who live in the band's home region of Närpes and is more or less incomprehensible to other Swedish speakers. Over time, the videos developed into *South-Park*-style animations of the odd stories that are told in the songs; for instance, *Laihela* tells the story of a convict who escapes from prison and starts a new life. The same visual approach also permeated 1G3B's Advent calendars, which the band published on its website every December. Each day, a new window was inserted on the calendar offering a new joke, picture, or short clip of some kind. A substantial portion of the visual material used in the video clips was downloaded from the Internet, adding an eclectic roughness and a do-it-yourself underground character to the general style.

The band's use of dialect can be described as a creative rather than a conserving act, aimed not at repeating the old 'authentic' local way of speaking but at using it as a platform for personal expression (interview, Nissinen and Lindholm 2009). This unorthodox approach to dialect can be found in combination with themes ranging from laddish humour to observations about life's absurd aspects. For those who know the dialect, the lyrics correspond to the general ideas of relief humour, youthfully breaking many of the local community's norms and traditional values.

Although it has been claimed that probably up to 50% of Finland's Swedish population speaks their local Swedish dialect as their only true mother tongue, which is the only language that they have truly mastered (Loman 1983: 71), very few Finland-Swedish rock musicians have written song lyrics in their dialect. The fact that 1G3B has combined the Närpes dialect, which, for most Swedish-speakers, signifies local rural traditions, with the stylistic features of brutal, extreme metal and bizarre show elements is, according to journalists, exceptional (see e.g., Jungell 2009; Al Fakir 2010). This combination creates an incongruous humorous effect, which is generally received with enthusiasm, although also at times with a certain amazement (e.g., Kavonen 2009; Roth 2009). Linking the Närpes dialect with distorted guitars and drop-down tuned bass

playing power chords in Aeolian, Phrygian, or Locrian modes over intense drum patterns on double bass drums appears to question many of the preconceived ideas about the local Swedish dialect and the musical styles that are used.

1G3B's web activities became an early digital success in the noughties. The band's website averaged 6,000 visits per month, and every December, the Advent calendar could attract up to 18,000 visitors (interview Nissinen and Lindholm 2009). These are impressive figures considering the size of the population that understands the Närpes dialect. Despite 1G3B's choice of dialect, the band's songs do not explicitly deal with minority or regional issues. For the band members, linguistic exceptionality is a natural fact that permeates the band's work rather than a political agenda. However, 1G3B's linguistic and regional uniqueness is an important feature that is also emphasised in the band's public image. The website has managed to re-territorialise a Närpesian musical culture on the Internet, not only by distributing music and videos, but also by functioning as a meeting place for people who have probably moved away from their home region.

1G3B is an example of how humour can have a cohesive social function. Through its artistic and social interactionist activities, the band has created a platform for collectivism, but one that only partly corresponds with the general established Finland-Swedish minority ethnicity. This ambiguity is also manifested in the incongruity humour that is a fundamental feature of their polysemic style. Following a do-it-yourself ethos that is similar to punk rockers' (see Ellis 2012: 73), the band created a bricolage of everyday audio-visual elements, the meanings of which were reconstituted to facilitate a transformation into incongruous humour.

### **3. Pleppo: Mashup Techniques and Ironic Comments About Finland-Swedish Family Life**

Teenagers Ted Forsström and Kaj Korkea-aho of the comic duo Pleppo were among those who made use of the possibilities of new digital technology at an early stage, at the end of the 1990s. Pleppo started by launching their own website, which was originally an unpretentious underground project but gradually developed and became the starting point for the duo's successful entertainment career. Over the years, Pleppo has, among other things, produced Internet podcasts and videos, radio and television shows for the Finnish Broadcasting Company, stand-up comedy, and stage shows for the theatre (see Brusila and Ramstedt 2019: 149–150).

Especially in the beginning of Pleppo's career, the duo's humour was largely based on youthful joking about family life, social norms and stereotypes, sexuality, and absurd wordplays. In many ways, they embody relief humour, often raising those areas of concern that are often suppressed in public debate, despite—or perhaps precisely because—of the high level of interest in such things among many youngsters. Their video clips' humorous effect is often produced through unexpected combinations of verbal, narrative, visual, and musical elements. This incongruity is probably clearest in animations like *Välkomna till mommos! (Welcome to Grandma's!)*, which tells about a family that reluctantly goes to visit their grandmother. The grandmother proves to be an



almost diabolical character, who presses her delicacies upon the family members, while singing about the service to the melody of the Guns N' Roses hard rock hit 'Welcome to the Jungle'. Here, the humorous effect is based on an absurd combination of preconceived notions about grandmothers, family reunions, and a particular song that signifies the sinful rock life.

Pleppo had its greatest Internet success in the period 2004–2005, with its controversial version of the famous Moomin children's animation television series based on Finland-Swedish author Tove Janson's books. Pleppo made the videos because they wanted to comment ironically on the illusory picture of the perfect Finland-Swedish family that the Moomins, according to Pleppo (*Seportaget: Ted och Kaj*), have come to represent. They titled the new version *Mumin visar allt* (*Moomin Reveals It All*) and, in general, many of its jokes show aspects of relief humour. The wit is based on editing the originals to show the Moomin family misbehaving by committing various debauched perverse acts, as signalled by the use of the Electric Six rock tune 'Gay Bar' as the series' introductory signature. Pleppo's criticism was also directed against Finland's Swedish-speaking minority's self-portrayal, which is often ironically called 'the Moomin valley' in reference to small, closed circles where everything is nice and everybody knows one another. This ironic commentary involved making fun of the sweet, neutral form of Swedish that is spoken in the original Moomin series, which is something completely different from the dialects and slang that Finland's Swedish-speaking children and youngsters actually use. To point out this inconsistency, the comic duo used phrases from transcribed interviews with Finland-Swedish teenagers to write a new, rude dialogue for the videos.

Within a short period of time, Pleppo's Moomin videos had been viewed by 60,000 visitors. However, the videos' popularity also led to complications involving Moomin Characters Limited, which controls the Moomin copyright, and the company demanded that the videos be removed. Pleppo acquiesced to the company's request, but copies of the videos and even new Pleppo fan-made versions are still circulating and being published on fan sites (e.g., *Mumin Visar Allt - alla originalavsnitt arkiverade*).

Many of Pleppo's projects draw on the same technical and aesthetic ideals as the so-called mashup culture on the Internet; they are based on the modification of existing digital works to create a derivative work (cf. Tough 2010: 206). As is the case with much mashup humour, Pleppo's products often derive from the apparent incongruity and absurdity of the ingredients being mixed. The mashups employ shocking incongruity humour that bears similarity to the punks' earlier do-it-yourself subcultural aesthetics, which they wielded as their principal weapon of scorn (compare Ellis 2012: 58, 73). The end result forces the audience to review many of the stereotypical concepts and presumptions that are held by various social groups. When the pun is directed at the Finland-Swedish people's sense of self-identification and group cohesion, humour offers an opportunity for young artists and their audiences to negotiate themselves as well as their relationships to their social backgrounds.



#### 4. Kaj: The Transformation of Local Revue Traditions Into Parodic Internet Videos

Many of the artistic formats launched by 1G3B and Pleppo were developed further in the 2010s by the trio Humorgruppen Kaj (The Humour Group Kaj), which consists of Kevin Holmström (lead guitar and vocals), Axel Åhman (bass, vocals, and harmonica), and Jakob Norrgård (lead vocals). The group started as a live band performing its own humorous songs and verbal numbers, but the Internet became an increasingly important medium for its creative projects. Instead of creating their own website, however, the band chose to follow early-stage digital trends, and today, its main platforms are Facebook (Facebook: Kaj), YouTube (Youtube: KAJfilmer), and the band's online store (*KAJstore*). Kaj uses these pages to share their music videos and sketches, as well as their Advent calendars, which are released every December. These projects' success has also led to theatre shows and productions for the Finnish National Broadcasting Company. The band enjoys remarkable popularity among the Finland-Swedish population. Furthermore, its most popular YouTube video, *Jão nã e ja jão YOLO ja nã*, has been viewed more than 1.2 million times on YouTube.

Kaj's members are from the Vörå region in Ostrobothnia, and ever since the beginning of their careers, they have used their local dialect in their songs and sketches. The members always emphasise that their choice of dialect is natural because it is the language that they use to communicate with each other and perform in their home region (e.g., *Kaj pjasar på TV*). Audiences from other regions, for whom the dialect is exotic but not totally incomprehensible, are delighted by the many humorous connotations. The use of this dialect in songs and sketches has a long tradition in Ostrobothnia, where, for decades, the youth clubs have arranged annual musical revues in which Anglo-American pop evergreens are translated into regional dialects with lyrics that often comment on the home village's current affairs. Kaj has successfully managed to transform this tradition into a digitised media concept that has gained popularity in other Swedish-speaking regions in Finland. This includes joking about stereotypes of Swedish-speaking people and in some cases also the Finnish-speaking population, albeit in a more self-ironic than sarcastic manner.

Many of Kaj's music videos are based on parody, incorporating aspects of superiority, incongruity, and relief. The humorous effect is often born when satire is pastiche-like and stylistically very close to, yet not totally congruent with, the song's subject. For example, in *The KAJfrontation*, a mundane quarrel about using a flatmate's coffee cup turns into an absurd musical kitchen melodrama that is incongruously sung in the very local Vörå dialect to the bombastic tune 'The Confrontation' from *Les Misérables*. Similarly, the band addresses the clichés associated with Finland-Swedish youth musicals (*Siisti mopo* or *Cool Moped*), folk dance and dance pavilion traditions (*Polka på Pittjärvi Paviljongen* or *Polka at the Cocklake Pavilion*), and punk demo bands (*Demotisdag* or *Demo Tuesday*). The band makes fun of generational and regional conflicts between Finland-Swedish communities in a way that can be said to reflect superior attitudes or relief from general norms and expectations. However, as a rule,

Kaj's humour is more compassionate than mordant.

This irony, with its self-ironic features, is particularly clear in the music videos that make fun of stereotypes of Finland's language groups. For example, the early hit *Tango taas* tells a story about a shy middle-aged single man who lives with his mother in a rural Swedish-speaking region and goes to a Finnish tango festival to find a wife. Despite linguistic and cultural clashes, the man meets a Finnish-speaking woman and ends up in bed with her. The shy man is overwhelmed by the woman's passionate nature, as she demands that they tango over and over again. Rhythmically, the song is not a tango; rather, it is something resembling a foxtrot, with the bass line alternating between the root and the fifth of each chord. However, in this context, the strong emphasis on rhythm and the use of minor chords makes it sound like a pastiche of Finnish tango. The song ridicules stereotypes of the Finnish majority population, which is usually portrayed as a group of silent but passionate, even violent, i.e. knife-fighting, hard-drinking tango dancers. Perhaps most of all, the song makes fun of shy middle-aged mama's boys who still live on their family farms with their elderly mothers and cannot find women to marry. This self-ironic joking about being a man living in a rural area in a changing world is a common theme in Kaj's songs, in the vein of ironic remarks about the bandmembers' rural Finland-Swedish home region in general.

In a similar manner, the song 'Hupparipäivä' ('Hoodie Day') can be called a pastiche of Finnish pop rap, since it features many of the genre's most common musical and visual clichés and references the most famous Finnish rap artist, Cheek (here named 'Cheep'). However, the video clip starts with a short sketch in which the members explain that the idea of writing a song in Finnish came from the band's plans to break into the national mainstream market. Although one of the bandmembers doubts the plan because the band's Finnish is appalling, they decide to pursue it anyhow. The sketch is followed by a song that includes superficially idiomatic rhyming and phrasing, but the lyrics actually consist of largely nonsensical Finnish expressions lined up on top of a pop hip hop beat track. In the videos, the group can position itself as superior relative to the songs' main subjects, Finnish pop rap artists, and in a more general sense, even the Finnish-speaking population at large. However, this is done in a way that involves mocking their own cultural background and their limited knowledge of the majority language.

The complexity of such irony raises questions about the intricacy and limits of superiority theories. Scruton (1987), who draws on superiority theories but ultimately dismisses them, distinguishes between sarcasm and irony. For him, the former is about laughing at somebody in a way that entails rejection, whereas the latter is about laughing without rejection and also involves a certain aspect of laughing at oneself. Thus, sarcasm is always negative, while irony is not. In Kaj's videos, the more sarcastic features are common in jokes about the Finnish majority population, but these aspects are softened by self-ironic observations about the bandmembers' own cultural and linguistic background. Kaj reconstructs stereotypical ideas not only of the Finnish-speaking but also of the Swedish-speaking communities. On the other hand, due to the ambiguous nature of the humour, this includes the negotiation of a position within the national population in

general and the minority population in particular. The band has, in other words, managed to balance the inclusive and exclusive elements of humour. As Fine (1983) argues, humour can be used to create and define a group culture not only by providing social solidarity, but also by demarcating a group's identity in relation to others. It is through balancing these tensions and redefining a previously local tradition as a general minority phenomenon that the group has found its place in mainstream Finland-Swedish entertainment media.

## 5. Alfred Backa: Self-Ironic Observations of Finland-Swedishness

In the 2010s, comedian and troubadour Alfred Backa adopted the same Internet formats as his peers, but often with a more explicit political agenda. Backa has performed as a stand-up comedian and singer, accompanying himself on an acoustic guitar and playing the harmonica. He has his own website where he advertises his projects and products and distributes his podcasts (*Alfred Backa*). Over the years, Backa has also produced shows for the Finnish Broadcasting Company, and many of his sketches are available on YouTube.

A common starting point for his musical sketches is an incongruity created by combining a joke's thematic field with an unexpected musical style. For example, jokes about the generation gap use hip hop or other fashionable music as a means of making fun of stereotypes of elderly people. In 'Pensionärsrap' ('Pensioner Rap'), Backa performs as a pensioner rapping about his life; he uses rude expressions and gestures to question the clichéd picture of the elderly as weak and passive. In 'Åka Gambä Style' ('Travelling Pensioner Style'), Backa is a young man who dresses up as an old man in order to travel on a cheaper pensioner's ticket. The song is based on Psy's hit 'Gangnam Style', and Backa creates a comic effect by combining the music, the lyrics (performed in dialect), the topic, and clumsy dance moves, which are based on Psy's performance in the original YouTube music video.

This satirical ridiculing is further developed in Backa's political songs, which often target the current neo-conservative nationalist populist tendencies in Finnish politics. A humorous effect is often born from adding a simple diatonic tune, reminiscent of a cheerful children's song performed on a synthesiser, to sarcastic political parody. For example, in 'Sannfinländarnas nya ordlista' ('The New Vocabulary of Perussuomalaiset'), Backa ridicules the Finnish nationalist populist party, in English called the Finns Party. The song's lyrics include words that the party leaders have forbidden party members to use in public to avoid accusations of being racists, such as *hurri* (a derogative term for a Finland-Swede), Negro, and gypsy. The pun attacks the idea that avoiding certain expressions is enough to correct the party's public image, as underscored by Backa's ironic comments in the song's closing lines: 'If you bash a dark-skinned person, don't call him Negro because if you do that you lose your credibility and somebody can think you are a racist'. This kind of critical satire could be called superiority humour, which is typical among protest singers, who assume a moral high ground or superior position in relation to their targets and use humour as a social corrective (compare Ellis 2012: 5 on

Billy Bragg).

Although such satire is often, though not exclusively, directed towards conservative nationalism, it can also include self-irony and target the Finland-Swedish minority. The song 'När Svenskfinland dog' (which could be translated as 'When the Swedish Region of Finland Died' or simply as 'When Finland-Swedishness Died') embodies this ambiguous double-sidedness, which adds to the humorous effect, while simultaneously forcing listeners to ponder the object of their laughter. 'När Svenskfinland dog' is based on American folk singer Don McLean's hit 'American Pie', which was released in 1971 and is often interpreted as describing how the liberal ideologies of the 1960s died after the Vietnam War and how the general social climate became harsher. In a sense, Backa's new lyrics can be interpreted as describing the current social climate in Finland, where many minorities feel threatened by the rise of right-wing populism and nationalism. On the other hand, just as McLean's 'American Pie' can and has been understood in several ways, Backa's song can also be variously interpreted. The lyrics and visual imagery in the music video for 'När Svenskfinland dog' also ridicule the conceited Finland-Swedish cultural and political establishment for its incompetence in terms of problem solving. As an established Finland-Swedish artist, Backa directs his wit against himself and by extension towards the Finland-Swedish cultural workers whose own feebleness is suggested to be a cause of the degeneration of Finland-Swedishness. The song ends self-ironically, with Backa singing: 'He who has written this song should be fucking flogged / If this show is the kind of culture that people want to spread in this country / it is most likely because of that / that we let the Finland-Swedishness die'. In this context, the lines reflect self-irony rather than sarcastic self-criticism (following Scruton 1987). The Finland-Swedish audience's laughter does not signify an outright denunciation of Backa; rather, the audience joins the artist in laughing at the community.

In a new version of the song released in 2014, Backa added ironic lyrics describing how the Finland-Swedes tried to organise a counter-strike under duress by assembling an armada of yachts, which lacked guns and was therefore forced to fire champagne corks at the enemy. Thus, while Backa criticises the current political and cultural situation in Finland, he also makes ironic remarks that are based on standard clichés concerning the Finland-Swedish elite and cultural workers such as himself. The many levels of humour include both sarcasm and irony; one laughs at and rejects the conservative and elitist tendencies, but the song also offers Finland-Swedes the opportunity to laugh at themselves.

## 6. Conclusion

The humorous mechanisms that are applied to musical, lyrical, and audio-visual creation include elements of superiority, incongruity, and relief. The satirical criticism embedded in some of the abovementioned songs displays characteristics of superiority in relation to the object of laughter, not least of all when making fun of nationalist tendencies, which minorities view as threatening. Incongruity is perhaps one of the most common forms of musical humour, as it works even within a solely auditive format when unexpected

stylistic features are combined in unexpected ways. However, when lyrics and visual elements are combined with music, it is even easier to create contrast that elicits laughter. As the examples show, this offers a means to link styles of music, political themes, dialects, and visual material in ways that create comic absurdity and question common ideas and cultural models. Humour's potential to offer relief is clear in many of the discussed examples, where the songs and video clips target the restraint that conventional social norms represent. Since all of the artists whose work has been analysed here are young men, it is likely unsurprising that many of their jokes relate to sexuality and some also to various kinds of aggression. Thus, in all their youthfulness, the video clips afford a safety valve for many subjects that are often otherwise suppressed in public debate.

What makes these humorous mechanisms so interesting for the study of music and minorities is that they all have social functions that are not only descriptive of but also crucial to contested terrains for the construction of a minority identity. In many cases, the humorousness of the music and the video clips constructs or enhances self-identification by contrasting a particular ethnicity with that of an other. In the case of Finland's Swedish-speaking minority, this is often done by joking about the stereotypical ideas surrounding the country's linguistic groups. However, the introduction of new digital technology has not only created new opportunities for expressing a minority identity, it has also made it easier to renegotiate and renew ethnicity through artistic expression.

Humour provides an empowering opportunity for constructing a minority ethnicity, but it also gives individuals a chance to express their multiple identities. This involves incorporating personal artistic features or thematic elements that reflect other sides of private self-identification. Given that they are individual and often to some extent stand in contrast with the established ethnic group identification, they can involve a critical re-evaluation of the minority's taken-for granted norms. For example, the case studies discussed in this analysis show how youngsters who originally had no access to mainstream media production have managed to combine linguistic, musical, cultural, and artistic features in ways that not only express their Finland-Swedishness but also their complex relations to this minority identity and its institutionalised cultural standards. The polysemic character of artistic expression makes it possible to use music, lyrics, and visual means to live out multiple identities in complex, humorous ways. The music video clips can simultaneously consolidate and question stereotypes through their use of dialect, local references, and self-ironic commentary. Thus, humour both participates in the construction of ethnicity and in creating alternative versions of it.

Humour's importance in musical expression and to the study of music and minorities lies in its complex and often ambiguous power. It helps to refresh rigid social structures, which is necessary to keep society alive. Following Bergson (2011, see also Billig 2005: 127–128), we can state that laughter is important because it produces the effect of ridicule, which is needed so that society does not repeat the laughter-inducing acts. Without laughter, social life would become so rigid that society would fail to renew its structures. The same can be said about humour in the context of music and minorities. Without musical humour, minority ethnicities would run the risk of waning and disappearing or, as Alfred Backa sings in the final lines of his 2014 version of 'När

Svenskfinland Dog' ('When Finland-Swedishness Died'): 'The day that we stop making fun of each other and our linguistic milieu is, I suppose, the day that we let Finland-Swedishness die'. The humorous aspects of the subject of music and minorities are not only about laughing at social phenomena such as majority or minority ethnicity, they are also a key element in the preservation and renewal of the whole sense of minority belonging. Without humour to ironise the minority, it could quite possibly cease to exist.

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